

Lithuania Move Is 'Illegitimate,' Gorbachev Says

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MOSCOW, March 13 — President Mikhail S. Gorbachev today rejected Lithuania's declaration of independence, calling the decision "illegitimate and invalid," and he ruled out negotiations with the three Baltic republics on their quest for sovereign statehood.

But representatives from the Baltic republics said that while Mr. Gorbachev was taking a hard public line, he had already begun private discussions with them about the nature of their republics' future relations with Moscow.

Mr. Gorbachev's dual posture may well be an attempt to appease conservative deputies, and put off action on the Baltic question, while the Congress of People's Deputies was concluding crucial parliamentary deliberations on the legislation creating a powerful new executive presidency.

'No Question of Talks'

"Lithuanians, along with representatives of Latvia and Estonia, have asked to hold talks," Mr. Gorbachev said at the start of the second day of the congress's deliberations. "There can be no question of talks. We hold talks only with foreign states."

Despite Mr. Gorbachev's seemingly categorical condemnation of the Lithuanian decision and his public rejection of requests from the Baltic states for talks on independence, deputies from Estonia said their parliament would also make a formal break with the Soviet Union on Thursday. Estonian

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Lithuania Assailed by Gorbachev For 'Illegitimate and Invalid' Move

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deputies said Mr. Gorbachev struck a deal during the congress, promising them immediate negotiations on issues related to their sovereignty in exchange for their votes today in the debate on the presidency.

Many of the Baltic deputies had announced that they would refrain from voting at the congress on the ground that they had no right to revise the Soviet governmental structure as they were busily attempting to withdraw from it.

Deals for Talks Asserted

"So now today we behaved nicely and to some extent participated in the proceedings," said Endel Lippmaa, an Estonian deputy. "And for this, we are guaranteed the beginnings of the negotiations for the national independence of Lithuania and Estonia."

Lithuania became the first Soviet republic to declare its independence from Moscow when its parliament voted unanimously on Sunday to restore the independent statehood the country enjoyed before it was forcibly annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

The decision could not have come as a surprise to Mr. Gorbachev, since Lithuania had been steadily and openly pursuing the course leading to Sunday's vote.

But Mr. Gorbachev may well have been annoyed that the Lithuanians forced the issue just a day before the opening of the special congressional session, called to consider his proposal for a revitalized Soviet presidency free of Politburo constraints.

Public vs. Private Gorbachev

Compounding the potential of Mr. Gorbachev's discomfort over the issue was the decision of the Lithuanian parliament not to elect as its president Algirdas Brazauskas, the republic's Communist Party leader, with whom Mr. Gorbachev had created a respectfully adversarial relationship during conversations about Lithuania's desire

for independence. Instead the Lithuanian parliament overwhelmingly chose Vytautas Landsbergis, head of the grass-roots Sajudis movement.

Mr. Brazauskas, who is planning a return to the Lithuanian political stage, met today with Mr. Gorbachev. And although he gave no details of the meeting, he told reporters that Mr. Gorbachev's criticism of the declaration of independence was "just for public consumption."

The Estonian president, Arnold Ruutel, also said today that Mr. Gorbachev's public stand was quite different from his private one. Mr. Ruutel said that deputies from his republic met with Mr. Gorbachev on Monday and asked to begin negotiations with Moscow on independence.

Mr. Ruutel reported that far from being antagonistic, Mr. Gorbachev said, "Let us consider that talks have already begun."

Deputies' Conflicting Reports

Yet throughout the afternoon, other Baltic deputies brought alternating and often conflicting reports about whether what they took to be their

Is the Soviet chief's public stance for show?

deals with Mr. Gorbachev were on or whether they had fallen through.

In the end, some of the Estonians and Latvians but none of the Lithuanians took part in the presidential vote.

Nikolai Medvedev, a deputy from Lithuania, said he understood that "bilateral talks" between Moscow and Lithuania "about what to do next" would begin in Moscow on March 15. He said it appeared that Estonia would hold separate talks with the Kremlin.

Mr. Gorbachev did not come out into the foyer of the Palace of Congresses,



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Moscow rejected Lithuania's declaration of independence.

where the session is being held, and so could not be questioned by reporters about Baltic deputies' assertions that their negotiations with the leadership are proceeding.

In attempts to reconcile the Soviet leader's public utterances with what the Baltic representatives asserted were his more private views, some members of the Soviet leadership were trying to draw distinctions today between negotiations with the Baltic republics and discussions with them.

Yegor K. Ligachev, considered one of the most orthodox members of the Communist Party Politburo, said today that while "there can be discussions, yes, that's natural," he considered it "impossible to hold negotiations with" Lithuania.

He insisted that there was a "fundamental difference" between the leadership's willingness to "sit down at a table and discuss" and negotiations, but he did not specify what that difference was.

Deputies from the Baltic republics continued to express confidence that they would in fact gain the independence they are seeking through negotiations. For them, the paramount issue was how painful, costly and protracted the disengagement process was likely to be.

"You may call them whatever you like," said Andres Plotnyeks, a deputy from Latvia. "But there will have to be talks between the center and the republics on the basis of equality and not dictatorship."